Myths Christians Believe – False Beliefs Exposed

Sue Bohlin identifies and examines some common false beliefs held by many Christians. These beliefs, which are countered by biblical scripture, range from considerations of angels to heaven to salvation to "God helps those who help themselves."

Angels, Good and Bad

In this article we examine some of the myths Christians believe.

There are lots of misconceptions about angels and devils that come from non-biblical sources ranging from great literature to films to the comic strips in our newspaper.

One myth about angels is that when a loved one dies, he or she becomes our guardian angel. While that can be a comforting thought, that's not what Scripture says. God created angels before He created the physical universe; because we know they sang together in worship and shouted for joy at the creation (Job 38:7). When believing loved ones die, they stay human, but they become better than they ever were on earth, and better than the angels. No angel was ever indwelled by God Himself, as Christians are!

An even greater myth that many people believe is the image of Satan as an ugly red creature with pitchfork, horns, and a tail who gladly reigns in hell. For this misconception we have several authors to thank, mainly the 13th century work of Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost,* written in the 1700s. The biblical image of Satan is of an angel who has fallen to irredeemable evil and depravity but yet can transform himself into a beautiful angel of light. (2 Cor. 11:14) He can make himself appear winsome, which is why people

can be attracted to the occult. But Satan is not the king of hell. Jesus disarmed him at the Cross, made a public spectacle of him and the rest of the demons, and made him into a defeated foe destined for an eternity of torment in the lake of fire. (Col. 2:15, Rev. 20:10)

Another misconception about Satan that many people believe is that he is the evil counterpart to God. In C.S. Lewis' preface to the Screwtape Letters, he answers the question of whether he believes in "the Devil":

> *Now, if by 'the Devil' you mean a power opposite to God and, like God, self-existent from all eternity, the answer is certainly No. There is no uncreated being except God. God has no opposite. No being could attain a "perfect badness" opposite to the perfect goodness of God; for when you have taken away every kind of good thing (intelligence, will, memory, energy, and existence itself) there would be none of him left.*

If I Do Everything Right, Life Will Work Smoothly.

A very common myth that many Christians believe is, "If I do everything right, life will work smoothly." We seem to be immersed in an attitude of entitlement, believing that God owes us an easy and comfortable life if we serve Him. We expect to be able to avoid all pain, and we look for formulas to make life work. Frankly, many of us are addicted to our own comfort zones, and when anything disturbs our comfort zone, we feel betrayed and abandoned by God.

So when life doesn't go so smoothly, we often jump to one of two conclusions. Either we must be sinning, or God is out to get us. The book of Job draws back the curtain on the unseen drama in the heavenlies and shows us that when problems come, it doesn't have to be one of these two options. Sometimes

things are going on behind the scenes in the heavenly realm that have nothing to do with our sin. And since God is totally good, it's a lie from the pit of hell that when bad things happen, God is out to get us in some kind of cosmic sadistic power play.

Even when we do everything right—although NOBODY does everything right, not even the holiest, most disciplined people—things can go wrong. The Bible gives us insight into why it might be happening. First, we live in a fallen world, where bad stuff happens because that's the consequence of sin. This includes natural disasters like hurricanes and tornadoes and floods, and includes moral disasters like divorce and abuse and murder.

Secondly, we live in a spiritual battle zone. Unseen demonic enemies attack us with spiritual warfare. God has provided spiritual armor, described in Ephesians 6, but if we don't put it on, His armor can't protect us.

Third, we have an inaccurate view of suffering. We think that if we're suffering, something is wrong and needs to be fixed. But 1 Peter 4:19 says that some people suffer according to the will of God. That doesn't sound very nice, but that's because we often think the most important thing in life is avoiding pain. But God isn't committed to keeping us comfortable, He's creating a Bride for His Son who needs to shine with character and perseverance and maturity.

The Lord Jesus promised that we would have tribulation in this world. (John 16:33) The word for tribulation means pressure; it means we get squeezed in by trouble. Jesus said that in the world we would have pressure, but in Him we have peace. Life won't always work smoothly, no matter how well we live, but we always have the presence and power of God Himself to take us through it.

God Won’t Give Me More Than I Can Handle.

People get baffled and angry when bad things happen, and it just gets worse when God doesn’t make the difficult situation go away. We start wondering if God has gone on vacation because we’re nearing our breaking point and God isn’t stepping in to make things better.

The problem with this myth is that God is in the business of breaking His people so that we will get to the point of complete dependence on Him.{1} Brokenness is a virtue, not something to be protected from. When the apostle Paul pleaded with God to remove his thorn in the flesh, God said no. Instead, He responded with an amazing promise: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Paul realized that his weakness was the very key to experiencing God’s strength and not his own.

One of my friends ministered as a chaplain at Ground Zero in New York after the Sept. 11 attacks. She got so tired and exhausted that she knew it was more than she could bear. That’s when she discovered that her exhaustion took her out of God’s way and He could shine through her, ministering with His strength through her profound weakness.

I love this definition of brokenness: “Brokenness is that place where we realize that all the things we counted on to make life work, don’t.”{2} God makes life work. Formulas don’t. Our own efforts don’t. Trustful dependence on Him plugs us into the power source for life. And that often happens when we’ve crossed over the line of what we can handle on our own.

God Helps Those Who Help Themselves.

This myth has been repeated so many times that many people think its in Scripture. It’s not. In fact, the truth is exactly the opposite. A heart full of self-dependence and self-reliance says to God, “I don’t need You, I can do it

myself. I can handle life without You." God honors our choices and the exercise of our will; He doesn't push His help on us. He waits for us to ask for it. He can't help those who help themselves because we're too busy *doing* to receive His strength and His help. It's like the way you can't fill a cup with coffee when it's already full of tea. Jesus said, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing." (John 15:5) But that doesn't stop lots of us from trying! The truth is, God doesn't help those who help themselves; God helps the helpless.

Two Myths About Heaven

The first myth is perpetuated by the many jokes and comics about St. Peter at the pearly gates. Many people believe that if our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds, St. Peter will let us into heaven. It doesn't work that way.

God has one standard for getting into heaven: absolute perfection and holiness. The person who has sinned the smallest sin is still guilty and cannot be perfect and holy. It's like a balloon: once it's popped, there's nothing anyone can do to make it whole again. Only one Person has ever qualified for heaven by being perfect and holy—the Lord Jesus. When we trust Christ as our Savior, He does two things for us: He pays the penalty for our sin, which keeps us out of hell, and He exchanges our sin for His righteousness, which allows us into heaven.

Another myth is that heaven is like a big socialist state where everybody gets a standard issue harp and halo and we all sit around on clouds all day praising God in a never-ending church service. Doesn't sound all that great, does it?

Fortunately, heaven's a whole lot better than that. For one thing, the reason we think worshiping God for all eternity is boring is because we don't know God as He really is. We're like the six-year-old boy who declared that "girls are stupid, and kissin' 'em is even stupider." Kids don't have a clue how

great love can be, and we don't have a clue how wonderful God is.

Heaven is no socialist state. There will be varying degrees of reward and responsibility in heaven, depending on the way we lived our life on earth. All believers will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, when God will test our works by passing them through the fire of motive. If we did things in His strength and for His glory, they will pass through the refining fire and emerge as gold, silver and costly stones. If we did things in our own flesh and for our glory or for the earthly payoff, we will have gotten all our strokes on earth, and our works will be burned up, not making it through the testing "fire."

There are different types of rewards in heaven: a prophet's reward, a righteous man's reward, and a disciple's reward. Some will receive the crown of life, or a martyr's crown, and there's also the crown of righteousness. Our lives in heaven will be determined by the choices, sacrifices, and actions of earth. Some will be very wealthy, and others will be "barely there." You can check our Web site for the scriptures about this.{3}

Myths About the Bible and Salvation

Many non-Christians believe a myth that is accepted by a lot of Christians as well—that the Bible has been changed and corrupted since it was written. The historical evidence actually makes a rather astounding case for the supernatural protection and preservation of both Old and New Testaments.

As soon as the New Testament documents were written, people immediately started making copies and passing them around. There are so many copies in existence that the New Testament is the best-documented piece of ancient literature in the world. And because there are so many copies, we can compare them to today's Bible and be assured that what we have is what

was written.

The Old Testament scribes were so meticulous in copying their manuscripts that they were obsessive about accuracy. They would count the middle letter of the entire original text and compare it to the middle letter of the new copy. If it didn't match, they'd make a new copy. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, they demonstrated that this collection of Old Testament scriptures has been faithfully preserved for two thousand years.

Many people believe that certain parts of the Bible have been corrupted or deleted, such as supposed teaching on reincarnation. However, this is just hearsay from people who do not understand how the canon of scripture was decided on. From the beginning of the church, Christians recognized the 27 books that make up the New Testament as God's inspired word, and the writings that weren't inspired were eventually dropped. We have some great articles on our Web site that explain about the reliability of the Bible.{4}

Many Christians believe another myth: "I believe in Jesus, but surely God will let people of other faiths into heaven too." Many seem to think that being a "good Muslim" or a "sincere Buddhist" should count for something.

This does make sense from a human perspective, but God didn't leave us in the dark trying to figure out truth on our own. He has revealed truth to us, both through Jesus and through the Bible. So regardless of what makes sense from our limited human perspective, we need to trust what God has said.

And Jesus, who ought to know because He is God in the flesh, said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by Me." (John 14:6) No other religion deals with the problem of sin and God's requirement of perfection and holiness on God's terms. There may be many ways to Jesus, but there's only way to the Father. It's God's heaven, and He

makes the rules: it’s Jesus or nothing.

Notes

1. I am indebted to Dr. Al Meredith, the pastor of Wedgwood Baptist Church in Ft. Worth, Texas, for this perspective. Wedgwood Baptist was the site of the massacre the night of the “See You At the Pole” celebration when seven youth and staff members were killed and seven others wounded by a crazed gunman.

2. Jeff Kinkade, pastor of Reinhardt Bible Church in Garland, Texas.

3. “Probe Answers Our E-Mail: Help Me Understand Rewards in Heaven.”

4. “Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?“. Also, “The Authority of the Bible” and “The Christian Canon“.

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